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CS501: People as Social and Cultural Beings: OA

Autobiographical Cultural Analysis and Reflection

I grew up with my mom, dad, older sister and baby brother in White Plains, New York. My mom and dad were never married; however, we spent a lot of time with my maternal grandparents. My maternal grandmother is black and Cherokee Indian. My maternal grandfather is also black and Cherokee Indian. Both were born and raised in Virginia.

We do not know much about my grandmother's family other than she grew up in Virginia and was one of six children. My grandfather was one of many children. We know that he is the baby of this very large family. We are not exactly sure how many, but he was raised with three of his sisters. His father, who is my great-grandfather was a black slave. My great-grandmother was Cherokee Indian.

Growing up in this family, we were aware that my grandfather spent a lot of his life trying to locate his siblings he never met. Black families who were slaves were often, like my great-grandparents, were used to breed, so the end result was that many children were created in order to use them as labor. The boys for the field and the girls for the home and field. Then oftentimes, families were separated because they were sold off as slave hands. I wanted to explain my background because it helped to shape my cultural heritage, family relations, social hierarchy and culture of ecclesial background.

Due to the experience my grandfather experience and the quest he felt led to have in searching for his siblings he was separated from as a young boy, it made him very family oriented. He made sure we went to every family reunion and knew our relatives. He moved to

West Virginia with my grandmother and they had their five children. I always found it interesting that he was against nicknames. The reason I remember getting from my mother was because growing up in a slave oriented family, many people had families and they gave nicknames to their children. As families were separated, it made it difficult to find their missing relatives because their names were either changed or they had used nicknames. As a result, my mother and her siblings were not given what is known as ethnic names because my grandparents wanted them to have a fair shake in life. As that teaching was passed down, my siblings and I were not given ethnic names because my parents wanted us to have a fair shake in life.

Growing up we were taught to speak proper English, comprehension and how to be creative. Everything that my grandfather was not taught, we were taught. We were all taught to be hard workers and to take care of home first. We were taught to be compassionate. There really wasn't a family hierarchy as both my parents and grandparents worked very hard.

There was a cultural ecclesial background that I am very proud of. Most southerners are of the Baptist religion. This may be why my grandfather ended up being a Baptist Pastor. In the south, if your father is the pastor, then it was expected that his your family is expected to be active in the church. That is no different for my family. My mother and her siblings were in the choir. It was very rare for the mother to be a pastor, but was expected to be the dutiful pastor's wife. What is ironic is that we were taught to be proud of our racial heritage of being black; however, nothing was ever said about our Cherokee Indian side of the family, other than the fact that we are of Black and Cherokee Indian decent. Granddaddy (we grandkids affectionately call him), taught his children about the blacks he found that was in the Bible such as the Ethiopian Eunuch and Moses. My mother was conditioned to teach us the same thing. They both wanted us to be aware that God had not forgotten about the black race and that we, too, had a place in

the Bible. We were constantly taught that we mattered to God and that we were to see ourselves in him. When my mother moved to New York, she found a Methodist Church with Pentecostal roots and joined that church. I found that interesting considering that my mom was raised Baptist and she became a Methodist and when she had her children, we became Pentecostal. The church that I belong to now is a multicultural non-denominational church with Pentecostal roots. Whether in the Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal or Non-Denominational church, it was impressed on us to be in Bible Study and/or Sunday school. The church had many choirs in the church. We did a lot of church fellowshiping with each other and other churches. Being in worship service was a must. Being at church every Sunday was imperative. Missionary work is the backbone of our church. We, even as children, were taught to evangelize. We had tent revivals and were encouraged to invite our friends to church. Even now, at the multi-cultural church I attend. The teaching is paramount, but I do see how in a multi-cultural church, many people of different cultural backgrounds attend, but we don't learn much about each other's background unless you fellowship with them outside of the church at lunch. I heard in one of Dr. John's lectures in class how sometimes in multi-cultural classes, that element is oftentimes missing. One of my questions, is why? I have to admit, that sometimes, even I as a black woman, feel a little left out culturally. Another question I have is how do we bridge that gap so that everyone feels included?

As I look back over my life and see what I was born into and where I am today, Author Michael Rynkiewich summed it up best when he wrote in his book, "Soul, Self and Society," we "must consider the weight of tradition in shaping people's behavior, but also consider that people are skilled at selecting and deploying the resources that culture provided in order to influence the form and function of relationships, groups and networks" (79).